



## **Defining Natural Environments Quiz More Rules for the Road**

### **Rulemaking Hearing Rules of the State Board of Education Chapter 0520-1-10 Tennessee's Early Intervention System**

It is important for service coordinators to become familiar with federal and state regulations. This activity will give you another opportunity to learn how to use Tennessee's Rulemaking Hearing Rules to find the answers you are seeking.

**1. Locate and write Tennessee's definition of natural environment.**

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**Cite the section where this information is found:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. T or F-The discussion of natural environments with families should only be about the locations where services are provided.**

**Cite the section where this information is found:** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. T or F-The natural environments in which the early intervention services will be provided, or a justification of the extent, if any, to which the services will not be provided in the natural environment is required content of the IFSP.**

**Cite the section where this information is found:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. Can justification be made for group intervention for children with sensory disabilities such as children who are deaf or hard of hearing? What types of team considerations might require such a justification? List considerations, and practice writing a justification for the outcome below. There is no right or wrong response. This is an opportunity to get feedback from the trainer about writing justifications.

Consider a hypothetical child who is deaf. One of the family's desired outcomes is that the child and family become comfortable participating in activities within their local deaf community. The IFSP team must design an intervention plan that will most effectively support progress toward this outcome.

Van Horn, J., Gomm, A., Edelman, L., Rush, D., Shelden, M. (2002, October). *Technical Assistance Document: Natural Environments*. New Mexico Family Infant Toddler Program, Santa Fe, New Mexico. [Online] Available: <http://www.health.state.nm.us/itsd/fit/pdf%5Cnatenv.pdf> [Retrieved: 2005, January 28].

**Things to consider:**

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**Sample justification:**

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**Defining Natural Environments Quiz  
More Rules for the Road – Trainer's Key**

**Rulemaking Hearing Rules of the State Board of Education  
Chapter 0520-1-10  
Tennessee's Early Intervention System**

1. **Locate and write Tennessee's definition of natural environment.**  
"Natural environment" means settings that are natural or normal for the child and family, including home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate and that are considered natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disability.  
**Where this information is found:** 0520-1-10-.01 Definitions, page 7 of 70.
2. **T or F-The discussion of natural environments with families should only be about the locations where services are provided.**  
"Therefore, the discussion of natural environments is not only about locations where services are provided, but also about a process, which identifies when and where in a family's normal routines interventions will be most effective."  
**Where this information is found:** Page 30 of 70
3. **T or F-The natural environments in which the early intervention services will be provided, or a justification of the extent, if any, to which the services will not be provided in the natural environment is required content of the IFSP.**  
**Where this information is found:** Page 35 of 70
4. **Can justification be made for group intervention for children with sensory disabilities such as children who are deaf or hard of hearing? What types of team considerations might require such a justification? List considerations, and practice writing a justification for the outcome below. There is no right or wrong response. This is an opportunity for the trainer to provide feedback about writing justifications.**

**Consider a hypothetical child who is deaf. One of the family's desired outcomes is that the child and family become comfortable participating in activities within their local deaf community. The IFSP**

**team must design an intervention plan that will most effectively support progress toward this outcome.**

**Things to consider and justification:**

Each child and family must be considered individually in terms of what they are hoping to accomplish or see change for their child and family as a result of their participation in early intervention (their desired outcomes). The IFSP is developed to support each child and family to make progress on the outcomes that have been determined. There are no condition-specific justifications defined or allowed by federal or state regulations.

There are always several necessary steps before deciding on the location of service delivery. For example, the team must understand what kinds of activities the family wants to participate in within their local deaf community, what supports they need to participate in these activities, and what challenges they might encounter. Next, the team will define what needs to change in order for the child and family to participate in these desired activities. It may be that the entire family needs to become more fluent communicating using sign language. It may be that sign language instruction and opportunities to communicate using sign language should occur with a group of other families with young children who are also using or learning to use sign language. Other needed early intervention services must still be provided in everyday routines, activities, and places unless this same decision-making process results in a need to provide the supports and services in settings other than natural environments.

**Trainer instruction:**

In discussing the response(s) of the participant, look for and/or emphasize the following:

- There are no set right or wrong responses to this activity.
- This is an individual team decision.
- There are no condition-specific justifications defined or allowed by federal or state regulations.
- The team must consider what kinds of activities the family prioritizes.
- Other needed early intervention services must still be provided in everyday routines, activities, and places unless this same decision-making process results in a need to provide the supports and services in settings other than natural environments.

Item 4: Van Horn, J., Gomm, A., Edelman, L., Rush, D., & Shelden, M. (2002, October). *Technical Assistance Document: Natural Environments*. New Mexico Family Infant Toddler Program, Santa Fe, New Mexico. [Online]. Available: <http://www.health.state.nm.us/itsd/fit/pdf%5Cnatenv.pdf> [Retrieved: 2005, January 28].

# Natural Environments

**Natural Environments** means settings that are natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disability.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 adds, as a component to the requirements of a Statewide system, policies and procedures to ensure that:

- To the maximum extent appropriate, early intervention services are provided in natural environments; and
- The provision of early intervention services for any infant and toddler occurs in a setting other than a natural environment only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment.

**Natural Environments** are the places where children experience everyday, typically occurring learning opportunities that promote and enhance behavioral and developmental competencies. Learning opportunities that are development enhancing are those that are both interesting and engaging to a child.

Learning opportunities occur in activity settings where the child plays and learns. For example, a home setting may include the kitchen where the child plays with pots and pans while the family members prepare meals. Learning opportunities in this setting are identified, e.g., how the child uses motor planning skills in this part of the natural family routine and what family members may do to encourage motor development. These learning opportunities build on existing capabilities. Understanding family routines is critical in identifying when learning opportunities occur in various settings.

**Sources of learning opportunities include:**

- Family routines and activities unique to each family
- Community resources that consist of people, organizations, and programs that provide both children and parents with opportunities and experiences that positively influence child, parent, and family development.

## Identifying Natural Environments

Identification of the child's natural environment begins at the first contact with the family and is developed throughout the family assessment process. It includes clarification of the routines and responsibilities that make up that family's lifestyle and their values and hopes for their family.

**Since the child and family's daily routines can affect how, when, and to what extent they are able to participate in early intervention, the following information should be obtained:**

- The family's daily routines, tasks, and responsibilities
- The activities and environments the family has identified as natural or normal for their family.

The family's natural supports should be identified. Research has shown consistently that the positive effects of support provided by informal supports sources generally outweigh the effects of support provided by formal networks.

**Examples of natural supports include:**

- Relatives
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Co-workers
- Church members and clergy
- Clubs and organizations

## **Natural Environments and the Development of the IFSP**

Outcomes are developed by the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team to promote the child's development within routines and responsibilities that make up that family's lifestyle and their values and hopes for their family (Tennessee, 1998).

The team must discuss and describe the family's routines, activities, supports, and environments that the family has identified as natural or normal for their family prior to the development of outcomes, strategies, and services.

The discussion must include identification of the family's natural environments (where the child and family spend their time on a daily basis) and determination of how services can be provided that respect the family's individualized needs and daily routines and supplements the natural supports.

## **Services in the Natural Environment**

The decision regarding what services and supports will be provided must occur only after the development of outcomes and strategies. Services, which support the strategies, are selected through a collaborative process between the parents and team members.

Services are to meet the unique needs of the child and family based on assessments and as described in the IFSP.

To the maximum extent appropriate, the program must deliver services that support the child and family in their natural environments. Services must be delivered where the child lives, learns, and plays in order to increase the likelihood that the skills learned will be functionally relevant to the child's natural environment and that the child will practice the skill on an ongoing basis. The overriding consideration in selection of the location in which a service will take place is that the selection for each child must be determined on an individual basis according to the child's needs.

The IFSP team determines what supplemental supports must be provided in order for the child to meet the outcomes listed in the IFSP.

**If the team is considering provision in a location other than a child's natural environment, the following must be documented in the IFSP:**

- An explanation of how and why the IFSP team determined that the child's outcomes could not be met if the service were provided in the child's natural environment with supplementary supports
- How services provided in this location will be generalized to support the child's ability to function in the natural environment
- A plan with timelines and the supports necessary to allow the child's outcomes to be satisfactorily achieved in the natural environment (Texas).

To the greatest extent appropriate, all services to support progress toward those outcomes should be provided within the "environment" that is natural for that child and family. Service provision in this context is based on the concept of providing services to the family in a manner that supports a more normal lifestyle as opposed to having services to support the child's development become another intrusion to their anticipated lifestyle (Bledsoe, 1998).

**Services in natural environments:**

- Support the natural flow of a family's activities
- Are delivered where the child lives, learns, and/or plays
- Decrease family's marginalization
- Use natural supports
- Build on existing capacity of community resources.

"Natural environments provide such a rich variety of learning opportunities. For babies, toddlers and preschoolers, their routines continue to support and reinforce the predictability in their lives. The ability to hear a door knock; anticipate interaction with someone; the smells from a kitchen; the colors in one's clothes; the noise of a trash truck; finding a lost treasure; to move from here to there; to see something from a different angle; the list goes on and on. Life is spontaneous and rich. With confidence, children will learn they can handle life. So with natural environments, we have the opportunity to help families and caretakers recognize the richness of opportunities to help a child become comfortable and confident so they can grow in mind, body and spirit, in spite of all the other things. As a parent I want all things to lead to cognitive growth, to decision-making with real consequences, ultimately to confidence and trust. I want goals that are realistic and can be met" (Huerta, 1998).

# Family (Home) and Community Natural Learning Environments and Children's Learning Opportunities

Family Settings	Community Settings
<p>Family Routines (Cooking, food shopping, animal care)</p> <p>Parenting Routines (Child's bedtime and bath time)</p> <p>Child Routines (Brushing teeth, dressing, eating)</p> <p>Literacy Activities (Looking at books, listening to stories)</p> <p>Play Activities (Drawing, lap games, playing with toys)</p> <p>Physical play (Roughhousing, ball games, swimming)</p> <p>Entertainment Activities (Dancing, singing, watching TV)</p> <p>Family Rituals (Family talks, spiritual readings, saying grace at meals)</p> <p>Family Celebrations (Holiday dinners, birthday parties, decorating the house)</p> <p>Socialization Activities (Having friends over, family picnics, visiting the neighbors)</p> <p>Gardening Activities (Outside work, planting flowers, growing vegetables)</p>	<p>Family Routines ( Running errands, car or bus rides, weekend chores)</p> <p>Family Outings (Shopping, eating out, visiting friends)</p> <p>Play Activities (Outdoor playgrounds, indoor playlands)</p> <p>Community Activities (Libraries, fairs, festivals)</p> <p>Physical Activities (Horseback riding, swimming, sledding)</p> <p>Children's Attractions (Petting zoos, nature centers, pet stores)</p> <p>Art/Entertainment Activities (Children's theater, storytellers, music activities)</p> <p>Church/Religious Activities (Sunday school, church services)</p> <p>Organizations and Groups (Karate, movement classes, parent/child groups)</p> <p>Sports (Soccer, T-ball, softball)</p> <p>Outdoor Activities (Taking walks, hiking, camping)</p>

(Dunst, 1998)



## Community Activities and Opportunities Useful for Increasing Child Learning Experiences

### **Amusements/ Attraction Amusement Parks**

Aquarium  
Arcades  
Aviaries, Bird Sanctuaries  
Displays and Attractions  
Farms, Seasonal/Holiday  
Activities  
Planetarium  
Play Lands  
Science Centers  
Train Rides  
Zoos and Wildlife Preserves

### **Arts and Culture**

Children's Interactive Museum  
Historic Sites  
Museums  
Musical/Plays/Ballet  
Outdoor Concerts  
Performing Arts for Children  
Regional Attractions

### **Clubs and Organizations**

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Big Brothers/Big Sisters  
Community Centers  
Ethnic Heritage Centers  
Family Centers  
Hobby/Activity Clubs  
MOMS Clubs  
Play Groups  
Scouting/Camp fire/Indian Guides  
Service Clubs  
Toy Lending Libraries  
YMCA/YWCA

### **Community Celebrations**

Block Parties  
Children's Festivals  
Community Day  
Church Festivals  
Local/Community/Regional Fairs  
Farm Shows  
Folk Festival  
Heritage Festival  
Historic Reenactments  
Holiday Festivals (hayrides, light  
shows)  
Parades  
Picnics

### **Family Outings**

Church/Synagogue  
Circus, Ice Capades  
Family Reunions  
Holiday Gatherings  
Movies  
Picnics  
Pumpkin Patches, Tree Farms  
Shopping, Eating Out  
Special Family Celebrations  
Vacations

### **Learning and Education**

After School Programs  
Art  
Book Store Story Hour  
Ceramics  
Children's Museum Activities  
Creative Movement  
Dance  
Day Care/Preschools

### **Drama**

Enrichment Classes  
Gymnastics  
Head Start/Even Start  
Library Story Time, Movies  
Lunch Bunch for Toddlers  
Magic Shows  
Music  
Nature Center Activities  
Parent Education Classes  
Puppet Shows  
Religious Education  
Science Center Activities  
Story Tellers

### **Outdoor Activities**

Biking  
Bird Watching  
Boating/Canoeing  
Camping  
Fishing  
Gardening  
Hiking  
Horseback Riding  
Kite Flying  
Skating/Sledding/Skiing  
Walks/Races

### **Parks and Recreation**

Open/Family Gym Time  
Organized Activities  
Parks  
Playgrounds  
Swimming Pools  
Summer Camps

### **Parent & Child**

Baby/Toddler Gym  
Neighborhood Games  
Pajama Story Time  
Playful Parenting  
Play Groups  
Time for Mommy & Me  
Water Babies

### **Sports**

Baseball/T-ball  
Basketball  
Bowling  
Football  
Golf/Miniature Golf  
Ice Skating  
Karate  
Roller Skating/Blading  
Soccer  
Softball  
Swimming  
Tennis  
Track & Field



### **Justification for Services outside the Natural Environment**

The purpose of this exercise is to allow the service coordinator to demonstrate the ability to document an example of the IFSP team's decision to address a child/family outcome outside the natural environment. You may base your response on a real family (unidentified) or create an example as desired.

Read handout 5.10 *Natural Environments* prior to completing this activity. The reading assignment and this worksheet are to be completed independently outside of training time and returned to the trainer for feedback. Following feedback and approval from the trainer, place the completed form in your portfolio.

**Briefly describe a child and family, including factors that influenced the IFSP team to consider addressing an outcome outside the identified natural environment.**

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**Write an outcome.**

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List options for service delivery that were considered by the team including the environments/settings that were identified by the family and team as natural environments/settings:

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Write the justification by completing the statement, "The desired outcome could not be achieved in the natural environment because":

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List how the services provided in a specialized setting will be generalized into the child's daily activities and routines, and include a plan with timelines and the supports necessary to return to early intervention within daily activities and routines.

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Approval by trainer/program coordinator:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of trainer: \_\_\_\_\_



**Meet Kim and Her Family  
and  
During the Initial Visit**

**Instructions**

In order to provide background family information and an example of recommended practice #1 (from the PowerPoint *Everyday Supports and Services*), take turns with the participant reading aloud the story of this family (5.12 *Meet Kim and Her Family*).

Allow the participant to silently read the first four paragraphs from handout 5.13 *During the Initial Visit*. Make the point that all intervention discussions focus on supporting the child's participation in the daily routines and activities unique to that family.

Ask participant to read aloud the information in the box on the right of the page that includes the evidence base from early intervention literature that supports the practice illustrated by the article.

Finally, we invite you to further explore the concepts of service provision within natural environments and contexts by reading additional materials. We have provided both a comprehensive bibliography and the complete *Position Paper on the Provision of Early Intervention Services in Accordance with Federal Requirements on Natural Environments* referenced earlier. Let's begin our journey!

## Meet Kim and Her Family

During a break at a rural community Child Health Fair, the clinic nurse referred Kim and her family to Las Cumbres Learning Services' early intervention program. Kim was born three months early and had been home from the hospital for only a month. Isabel, who is Kim's mother, was referred to Las Cumbres by the Special Baby Clinic of the University Hospital's neonatal intensive care unit follow up service. No one in Isabel's family had ever had any interaction with Las Cumbres so Isabel was hesitant to contact the agency. Isabel did have previous interactions with the community health clinic nurse involving other family members. Because of these interactions, she was more comfortable talking to the nurse about the referral for Kim. The nurse shared with the service coordinator that Isabel had wanted to come to the Fair to meet the Las Cumbres staff. However, she felt her baby was still too vulnerable to take out in public. Isabel agreed to have the clinic nurse ask someone from Las Cumbres to call her and left a contact number through which she could be reached.



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*Culture, ethnic heritage, individual family history, and personal values all may influence a parent's reaction to asking others for help (McWilliam, et. al., 1996).*

*Effective practice allows for a variety of ways for families to begin their relationships with the early intervention system. Supportive community networks are essential both to families and to service providers.*

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Early the next week the Las Cumbres service coordinator called the message number (the family didn't have a phone). Isabel returned the call later in the day. She shared that Kim was born three months prematurely and that at 5 months of age (chronological) she was still on oxygen. Isabel was a little concerned because Kim didn't seem to be doing the things that her older brother, Bobby, had done when he was 5 months old. In fact, even if you thought of Kim as being only 2 months old (adjusted age), she still seemed behind in her development. Bobby is a year older than Kim and has had neither developmental nor significant health concerns.

Isabel and Ramon, the children's father, have been married for 4 years. They have recently bought their own home in a fairly isolated mountainous region of our service area. Many members of both of their extended families live within a 30-mile radius of Isabel and Ramon. Their home is located two miles off of a paved road on a forest road. They live 7 miles from the nearest gas station; 15 miles from the nearest medical support; and 30 miles from the nearest grocery store and pharmacy. Although the home is equipped with a propane-fueled furnace, Isabel and Ramon prefer to heat the house as much as possible with their wood burning stoves. This preference is related to how they each grew up, the norms of their rural communities, and financial considerations.



Although Isabel worked outside of the home both before Bobby was born and for several months before Kim was born, she is currently home full time with the children. Her plan was to return to work when Kim was about 6 months old. When the family first decided to buy their home and stop living with relatives, it was with the assumption that they would have two incomes. Because of Kim's prematurity and medical problems, Isabel has not returned to work and does not anticipate being able to do so in the near future. Ramon works in a small town about 40 miles from home where he is a mechanic for farm machinery and equipment. Isabel and Ramon inherited some land around their home. They do some small-scale farming and care for livestock that they own jointly with other family members.

**B**oth Isabel and Ramon were on their high school basketball teams and have continued to help out with coaching of local teams. Isabel has found this more difficult to continue since Kim's birth. They are very devoted to extended family activities and are often involved in helping various family members with farming and household projects. Before the children were born, Isabel and Ramon were "regulars" on the weekend country-dance circuit.

**B**oth Isabel and Ramon are very interested in doing everything possible to support their children's development. Because of Ramon's work schedule and the amount of work he needs to do around the family home outside of regular work hours, he and Isabel have agreed that most of the interactions with the early intervention team will occur with Isabel and the children. Isabel will keep Ramon informed and knows that she can ask for a team meeting to be scheduled at a time that is convenient for Ramon when that seems necessary.

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*Researchers (Hanft & Pilkington, 2000; Bernheimer & Keogh, 1995; McWilliam, et. al., 1996) highlight the importance of asking families to "tell their stories" and then coming to understand those stories as a way to learn about family beliefs, values and attitudes about family life and raising a child with developmental delays.*

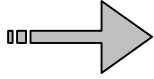
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## RECOMMENDED PRACTICE NUMBER ONE:

All intervention discussions focus on supporting the child's participation in the **daily routines and activities** unique to that family.



SOME WAYS THIS WAS DONE WITH KIM AND HER FAMILY:

### During the initial visit:

Isabel was encouraged to talk about how things were going for Kim and her family. The service coordinator noticed that Isabel described their activities with frequent references to how they did things when Bobby was a baby and what is different now that Kim is part of their family.

At one point, Isabel said, "I know I shouldn't keep comparing the two kids."

The service coordinator responded, "I've heard people say that too. At the same time, don't most of us make sense of things by observing and making comparisons to what is familiar to us? That sure is how we learn about how children grow and develop. We watch and learn together by comparing our observations."

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*These initial contacts set the stage for the intervention relationship both through conversations and actions.*

- ◆ *If we want parents to be active decision-makers, we must offer them useful information and meaningful choices.*
- ◆ *If we want parents to know we respect their decisions, we must listen to them and respond respectfully.*
- ◆ *If we want to convey that it is our role to address their concerns, we must be responsive to their stated needs and priorities.*
- ◆ *If we want to acknowledge parents as competent, we must recognize and acknowledge their skills and abilities. (McWilliam, et. al., 1996).*

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During this first visit with Kim and her family, the focus was very much on what life is like on a day-to-day basis for Isabel, Ramon and the children. Through this conversation it became clear for example, that while Isabel and Ramon were up early in the mornings, they were grateful that both children slept until nearly 8 a.m. most days. Isabel liked to watch the Today Show while she fed Kim and Bobby breakfast in the living room. She described feeling a "little silly" that this routine had become so important to her and worried that Bobby was starting to pay more attention to what was happening on the television. Isabel wondered if she might need to either turn the television off or turn on a children's station now that Bobby seemed more tuned in to the television. Since Kim's development had not yet been assessed, nor had the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) been developed at this point, the daily routines and activities information that Isabel shared was simply noted for future reference for possible use when the evaluation and IFSP were being planned.

### During the Evaluation/Assessment:

Isabel had asked the developmental specialist, who was a certified Infant Massage Instructor, for a refresher. She remembered being taught infant massage at the hospital but had not really used it since being home. Although the Individualized Family Service Plan had not yet been developed, in this situation, the home visitor made a decision to provide her service in a way that met an immediate need of Kim's family.



### ***Floor Play between Bobby and Kim and As Kim Gets Older***

#### **Instructions**

Allow participant to read the article silently. Dialogue could be role-played if time allows. Make the point that services are designed to individually support the child's participation in the lives of his family. Emphasize the importance of reinforcing sibling relationships in developing supports and services for families.

Ask participant to read aloud the information in the box on the right side of the pages in the handout that includes the evidence base from early intervention literature that supports the practice illustrated by the article.

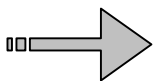
New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. *Our Journey with Families: Service Delivery in Natural Environments in Rural Areas*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nmddpc.com/PDFs/OurJourney.pdf> [Retrieved: 2004, May 20]. Made possible by a grant from the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.





## RECOMMENDED PRACTICE NUMBER TWO:

Services are designed to **individually support or enhance each child's participation** in settings where the family lives, learns and plays.



SOME WAYS THIS WAS DONE WITH KIM AND HER FAMILY:

### Floor play between Bobby and Kim

Isabel was very pleased with the results of activities that the physical therapist and developmental specialist suggested during previous interactions. These activities were things that the family was already doing with Kim but some qualitative changes were made to address Kim's special needs. Kim was entranced by the activities of her big brother Bobby. Very early in their relationship it was discovered that Bobby could distract Kim from minor crankiness, could get the best smiles and giggles of anyone in the family, and could keep Kim entertained for periods of time that allowed Isabel to get brief household tasks accomplished. Isabel was very interested in finding ways to keep these playful interactions between Bobby and Kim going and maybe even focus on some of Kim's skill needs in the process.

The developmental specialist began by watching a typical play time with Bobby and Kim. She noticed that Isabel usually set the situation up so that Kim was on a quilt on the floor with toys within reach. Sometimes Isabel needed to caution Bobby about his play and Kim's safety. For example, Bobby loved to crash his trucks into a tower of blocks and watch them fall. Kim also loved this activity and squealed in excitement. Isabel felt the need to adapt the game by asking that Bobby use Kim's cloth blocks rather than his wooden ones in case the blocks fell onto Kim. Bobby discovered that while the "CRASH!" wasn't nearly as loud, the cloth blocks did fly farther upon impact so the game remained fun for both him and Kim.



Isabel had already discovered that by putting Kim on her side she had an easier time reaching for her toys. With the support of the interventionists, she learned to cross one of Kim's legs over the other helping her bear weight on her foot and putting her into an almost-rolling-over position. To Isabel's delight, these small changes were helping Kim move more. With some guidance from his mother, Bobby liked to help Kim get in position to "almost" roll over and then cheered as she "plopped" onto her tummy or back from side lying.

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*It is essential that early intervention services reinforce relationships with typically developing siblings. By learning from and expanding on these naturally occurring learning opportunities between siblings and explaining their therapeutic value in language that is meaningful to all family members these opportunities multiply endlessly within natural environments and contexts (Hanft & Pilkington, 2000).*

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*Effective intervention uses what the child and family already does and embeds intervention into those activities, not the reverse. We do not want to train parents to be interventionists – to do what we do. Our purpose is to help the family think about and provide the opportunities and experiences that will help the child learn and gain independence in typical activities as they occur within the child's and family's lives (Cripe & Venn, 1997). Families desire information that is easy to incorporate into their daily lives and that helps the child to be part of the family and community (Bruder & Dunst, 2000; Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992).*

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**As Kim gets older,** both her and her family's needs change. Hers is an active family that is often on the go visiting family members, heading into town to shop and run errands, and going to community sports events. Following is another glimpse into an intervention interaction with Kim's family.



**Isabel** asked at one of my visits about "a better car seat" for Kim. Rather than assuming that I knew just what Isabel meant and what Kim needed, I asked, "Tell me a little more about this."

**Isabel** responded, "Well, Kim's getting so big, it's hard to carry her and to get her in and out of the car seat."

**I** was suddenly aware of how much Kim had grown in the 6 months since we first met her. Kim is now 11 months old (8 months adjusted age).

**"This** makes me remember when Kim seemed so tiny and fragile. Look at how far she has come! I wonder if we need to take a step back and think about how her nice growth is effecting things in general, as well as the car seat?"

**We** talked more about how Kim's size was affecting day-to-day life for her and her family. As we talked, it became clear to Isabel that she had been "making due" in terms of several of their routines without really thinking about what equipment might make things easier. Over time, we found a car seat that better met Kim's needs. We also adapted her stroller so that it offered her more support while still allowing her to use her hands to play. Central to this adaptation was keeping the stroller portable enough to allow Isabel to load and unload it, as well as the children into the car and go places fairly easily.

**Kim** had also outgrown her infant bathtub. Bobby wanted to try bathing with his sister and Isabel thought that might be fun for the two of them. The interventionist worked with Isabel to think of solutions that would give Kim the sitting support and safety she needed while also allowing her to play in the tub and still have plenty of room for Bobby too!

**The** family's bathmat, along with a small laundry basket with a foam pad placed inside proved to offer reasonable support. This solution was safe, used things the family had around the house and could easily replace when worn or outgrown, and looked "fun" from Bobby, Kim and Isabel's perspective. The solution also provided less than ideal positioning for Kim. The intervention team agreed that the need for Kim to have fun and play safely in the bath with her brother took priority for this part of the day over seating position.

By waiting and gathering more information before making recommendations, the interventionist is working to develop an understanding of the ways Kim's family solves problems and the resources they already have available (McWilliam, et.al., 1996).

Discussion and joint problem solving between family members and service providers support the family-guided nature of intervention. Before suggesting new strategies or solutions to families, it is essential to build on what each parent already knows and uses (FACETS, Intervention Principles for Family-Guided Routines, 1999).

**RECOMMENDED PRACTICE NUMBER TWO:** Services are designed to **individually support or enhance each child's participation** in settings where the family lives, learns and plays.

5.15a  
2



***Just Being Kids  
Nolan's Story***

**Instructions**

Show the six-minute video clip. Note that in this story, the primary service provider is a physical therapist. Ask the participant to respond to the following:

Briefly describe how the activities during bath time might change if the provider is from a different discipline, i.e. speech-language pathology, early childhood special education, occupational therapy, etc.



## ***Early in the Intervention Relationship***

### **Instructions**

Provide a copy of handout 5.18a. As the trainer, assume the role of the parent, and have the participant assume the role of the service coordinator.

Read the brief exchange aloud, playing your respective roles. Make the point that services should encourage the use of natural supports within each family's social and cultural framework.

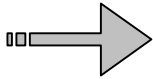
Ask a participant to read aloud the information in the box on the right side of the handout that includes the evidence base from early intervention literature that supports the practice illustrated by the article.

Return to PowerPoint.

New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. *Our Journey with Families: Service Delivery in Natural Environments in Rural Areas*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nmddpc.com/PDFs/OurJourney.pdf> [Retrieved: 2004, May 20]. Made possible by a grant from the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.



## **RECOMMENDED PRACTICE NUMBER FOUR:** Services foster the **use and development of natural supports** in each family's social and cultural network.



SOME WAYS THIS WAS DONE WITH KIM AND HER FAMILY:

**Early in the intervention relationship,** the service coordinator had the opportunity to set the stage for ongoing implementation of this recommended practice. Following is a peek into the very first home visit with this family:



*Isabel was waiting for me at the door with her two children. Kim was in her arms looking very alert. She was tuning her head back and forth in order to look at her brother Bobby and me. Kim had just a little fine reddish hair. She looked well fed and as if she had grown a lot from being born 3 months prematurely. Bobby, who is a year older than Kim, gave me a quick look then ran into the living room to get a toy truck to show me.*

*"Just look at this view of the valley you have! This quiet is heavenly." I exclaimed.*

*Isabel shared, "We just recently moved into this house. After living with relatives for years, it is so nice to have our own place. I know that it's pretty remote, but that's one of the things we love about this place."*

*"Is it ever hard to get out?" I asked.*

*"Sometimes it is. We just stay home then. It's nice to not feel like we should always be going places. In cold weather if we have to go to town we leave the house before it thaws. In the warmer weather, if the road is muddy, we use our 4WD. Sometimes I do have to call my neighbor to pull me out. Since we help him feed his animals and get wood it's no problem." Isabel explained.*

Follow along on this journey, as the service coordinator is able to build on the family's resourcefulness in order to solve a dilemma common to rural service delivery:



*The next three home visits were canceled. Each time, Isabel called to say, "You will never get in. The road is awfully muddy." After the third call, a light bulb went off! I asked Isabel to remind me how they got in and out when the road was muddy. Following the family's solution, I scheduled Kim's next visit for 7:00 a.m. so that the road would still be frozen from the night before and would be firm enough to drive on.*

.....

*Here the interventionist is effectively using a **solution-focused** approach by emphasizing a resource (the family's strategy for dealing with muddy roads) rather than a deficit (the muddy road causing missed visits). This approach has been shown to enable family members to become full participants in identifying and implementing solutions to their problems (Andrews & Andrews, 1995). At this point in their relationship, Isabel and the interventionist are exploring their roles. What better way to set a tone of partnership than to recognize the family as resourceful and knowledgeable about their environment!*

.....



## ***Just Being Kids Evan's Story***

### **Instructions**

Show the ten-minute video clip. Emphasize that recommended practices indicate that service providers act primarily as consultants to key individuals in the child's life.

#### **Brief discussion question:**

It is easy to identify the benefits that the early childhood teacher gets from working with the therapist. Ask participant to describe the benefits the therapist derives from working with the early childhood teacher.

**Return to final two slides of the PowerPoint for comments from parents in Tennessee.**

## **Position Paper on the Provision of Early Intervention Services in Accordance with Federal Requirements on Natural Environments**

April 2001

The purpose of this IDEA Infant and Toddlers Coordinators Association position paper is to provide, in one document, a comprehensive policy and practice statement about the provision of early intervention services as part of the routines and daily activities of young children with disabilities and their families to meet the natural environments requirements of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This paper includes a set of principles that characterize successful early intervention in natural environments, the relevant federal requirements, and additional statements from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The Association believes that:

Providing services in natural environments is not just the law, but more importantly, it reflects the core mission of early intervention, which is to support families to provide learning opportunities for their child within the activities, routines, and events of everyday life;

Early intervention should be a truly family-centered process that ensures young children with disabilities and their families receive early intervention services and supports as part of their daily routines and activities;

A child's parents and other family members are usually the primary individuals supporting and nurturing the child's growth, development and learning.

Appropriate to their needs, young children with disabilities have a right to receive services in the natural settings of their home or places in which children without disabilities participate in order to increase the opportunities for all children to learn, play, and interact together;

These requirements are consistent with the IDEA, Part B preference that services for children with disabilities beginning at age three be with typically developing peers; and

It is essential that the early intervention services system be consistent and align with other federal initiatives relating to Head Start, Child Care, Maternal and Child Health, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Therefore, the Association fully supports the provision of early intervention services within the context of families' activities and routines in meeting the natural environments requirements under Part C of IDEA.

## Principles Characterizing Successful Implementation

- a. The concept of providing early intervention services as part of the routines and daily activities of children and families is embedded in all written materials related to early intervention, and in every discussion with families and service providers. These discussions begin at the initial contact and continue through the entire process of service delivery and focus on functional participation in daily routines and activities. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team values preserving the family's typical routines and "fits the family" instead of making the family "fit the services".
- b. Early intervention services support or enhance the child's participation in daily activities and in the routines of their family in community settings where a child lives, learns, and plays.
- c. Children and families participate in a variety of community activities that are natural for them including those that occur in their home. Therefore, if the family does not want services in their home, another community setting is identified where the child's needs can be addressed.
- d. Providing early intervention within activities (bathtime, mealtime, reading, playing, etc) that occur in natural settings (home, childcare, playground, etc) offers opportunities for the child to learn and practice new skills to enhance growth and development.
- e. Natural groups of children are groups that would continue to exist with or without children with disabilities. Groups that are not "natural groups" include playgroups, toddler groups or child care settings that include only children with disabilities. However, even the most "natural" of groups is not a natural setting for a particular child if it is not part of that child's family's routine or community.
- f. Service settings that are not "natural settings" include clinics, hospitals, therapists' offices, rehabilitation centers, and segregated group settings. This includes any settings designed to serve children based on categories of disabilities or selected for the convenience of service providers.
- g. The provision of services in natural settings and during daily routines and activities fosters the use and development of natural supports in a family's social and cultural network. This promotes the family's full participation in community life.
- h. Family supports are individualized and based upon each family's daily activities and routines as well as their strengths, resources, and needs.
- i. When parents and other caregivers begin to identify learning opportunities and incorporate suggested interventions into daily activities and routines, using available materials in the environment, the child has more opportunities to experience and practice new skills.
- j. In developing the IFSP, outcomes are identified prior to determining how early intervention services will be provided. Determining intervention strategies begins with identifying and understanding the family's routines and daily activities. Services and supports are provided within these activities to maximize the child's opportunities for learning and practicing new skills.
- k. The primary role of service providers is to serve as consultants, identify key individuals (i.e., parents, care providers, teachers) across environments, and use their knowledge and expertise to help others who are part of the child's daily environments facilitate learning opportunities in natural settings that assist the child in achieving IFSP outcomes. (continued on next page...)



l. The IFSP team makes the decision about where the early intervention services within the daily activities and routines of the child and family are provided. No individual member of the team may unilaterally determine the setting for service delivery. The preferences of one team member cannot be considered acceptable justification for not providing services in natural settings. Every effort is made to select a setting that the entire IFSP team, including the parent, supports.

m. Justification for providing services in a setting outside of a natural environment includes sufficient documentation to support the IFSP team's decision that the child's outcome(s) could not be met in natural settings even with supplementary supports. This justification includes how the services provided in a specialized setting will be generalized into the child's daily activities and routines. It also includes a plan with timelines and the supports necessary to return to early intervention within daily activities and routines.

n. The concept of providing early intervention services within the child and family's daily activities and routines is promoted through all public awareness strategies and activities.

o. Inservice and preservice activities include curriculum and objectives to build awareness and understanding of how to identify learning opportunities and to provide early intervention services within the daily activities and routines of children and families in which learning naturally occurs.

All Part C contracts, grants, and memorandums of understanding are written in a language to reinforce early intervention in natural settings and as part of the normal daily activities and routines of children and families.

## **Federal IDEA Part C Regulations**

The following are the relevant sections related to natural environments from the IDEA Part C regulations at 34 CFR Part 303:

“To the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child, early intervention services must be provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate.” (34 CFR 303.12(b))

Each state participating in IDEA, Part C must establish and implement “policies and procedures to ensure that-

- (1) To the maximum extent appropriate, early intervention services are provided in natural environments; and
- (2) The provision of early intervention services for any infant or toddler occurs in a setting other than a natural environment only if early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment.” 34 CFR 303.167(c)

“Natural environments means settings that are natural or normal for the child’s age peers who have no disabilities.” 34 CFR 303.18

Each IFSP must include a statement of “the natural environments, as described in § 303.12(b), and § 303.18 in which early intervention services will be provided, and a justification of the extent, if any, to which the services will not be provided in a natural environment;” 34 CFR 303.344(d)(ii)

## **Additional Statements from US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)**

OSEP has issued a number of policy letters that clarify questions posed from states related to early intervention services and natural environments. The following is a summary of several of those letters:

## **Letter to Heskett, Missouri, May 26, 1999**

Digest of question: Can the IFSP team decide to provide early intervention in a program which provides services only for infants and toddlers with disabilities without a determination that the environment is necessary to satisfactorily achieve appropriate outcomes for the child?

Selected text from the response: "...For the provision of services in a setting outside of a natural environment to occur, the Part C regulations require a determination by the IFSP team that an infant or toddler cannot achieve identified early intervention outcomes satisfactorily if services are provided in a natural environment, and a justification for such an exception in the child's IFSP."

Digest of question: May a family choose to receive early intervention services in a center-based program which provides services only for infants and toddlers with disabilities, if that family determines the center-based program is best for their child and family?

Selected text from the response: "...Although Part C recognizes the importance of, and requires, parent involvement throughout the IFSP process, Part C does not relieve the State lead agency of its responsibility to ensure that other regulatory and statutory requirements, including the natural environments provisions, are met. While the family provides significant input regarding the provision of appropriate early intervention services, ultimate responsibility for determining what services are appropriate for a particular infant or toddler, including the location of such services, rests with the IFSP team as a whole. Therefore, it would be inconsistent with Part C for decisions of the IFSP team to be made unilaterally based solely on preference of the family. The State bears no responsibility under Part C for services that are selected exclusively by the parent; however the State must still provide all other services on the IFSP for which the parents did consent."

## Letter to Yarnell, Pennsylvania, October 19, 1999

Digest of question: Can the fact that receiving some services at a center with other families and their special needs child provides opportunities for parents to meet while participating in therapy be considered an appropriate justification for providing some service in a setting other than a natural environment?

Selected text from the response: .... "We share your concerns for the isolation and for the networking and training needs of parents. These are particularly important family needs and should be addressed by the IFSP team as a part of the development of the child's IFSP. ... any justification for the child's services to take place in a setting other than a natural environment must relate to the child's individual needs. Nothing in the law precludes such services from being provided in settings that include other children with disabilities as well as non-disabled children, as long as the requirements of part C are met, so that many opportunities may exist for parents of children with disabilities to interact. Because a parent's need for time with other parents of children with disabilities can be successfully accommodated in the natural environments where the child receives services, or in separate meetings, this parent need can not be used as a justification to deny the child the appropriate services in natural environments."

Digest of question: When the focus is on parent training, is this considered an appropriate justification for providing service in a setting other than a natural environment?

Selected text from the response: "... for services directed solely at the parent such as parent support, those services are not required to take place in a natural environment. No justification, therefore, is needed on the IFSP. Such services solely for the parent, however, cannot be used as a justification for providing services to the child in other than natural environments."

## **Letter to Elder, Texas, July 17, 1998**

Digest of question: If the IFSP team determines services can be satisfactorily achieved in the natural environment, does it violate Part C to provide services in a setting selected by the parent, which does not meet the definition of a natural environment even if the parents are incurring the cost of the setting?

Selected text from the response: "... if the parents do not consent to a particular location for a service specified in the IFSP, the State may not use Part C funds to provide that service in a location different from that identified on the IFSP. The parents are free to reject any service(s) on the IFSP by not providing written consent for that service(s) or by withdrawing consent after first providing it. If the parents do not provide consent for a particular early intervention service, which also includes the location, that service may not be provided. ..."

Digest of question: Can the state use state funds to provide services in settings other than those determined to be appropriate in the IFSP?

Selected text from the response: "... All funds used to implement the early intervention system under Part C must be used consistent with Part C. Thus, the State cannot circumvent the requirement to provide early intervention services in natural environments by using State funds that are budgeted for early intervention services under Part C and used to satisfy the nonsupplanting requirement. State and local funds used in a way inconsistent with the requirements of Part C may not be considered in determining whether a State has met the standard regarding supplanting in 34 CFR 303.124(b)."

**Letter to the Honorable Lynn Woolsey, California, March 21, 2000 :**

Digest of the Letter: In response to concerns raised by constituents, the Honorable Lynn Woolsey requested clarification from the U.S. Department of Education on the interpretation of the definition of natural environments. Specifically, does natural environments “mean only settings where children without disabilities are present and participate” and can programs such as those conducted by a hospital be excluded as a provider of early intervention services because it did not meet the definition of natural environments?

Selected text from the response: “. . .In general, providing services in a setting limited exclusively to infants and toddlers with disabilities would not constitute a natural environment. However, if a determination is made by the IFSP team that, based on all relevant information regarding the unique needs of the child, the child cannot satisfactorily achieve the identified early intervention outcomes in natural environments, then services could be provided in another environment. In such cases, a justification must be included on the IFSP.”

“ . . . It is not the Department’s practice to dictate which providers meet the requirements of qualified personnel, consistent with Part C, in order to provide early intervention services.. California must continue to ensure that early intervention services are provided consistent with all the requirements of Part C, regardless of who is providing the early intervention services. However, it is not true that Part C makes “ineligible” or “illegal” a centered-based program serving only children with disabilities. . . . [I]f justification is made on the IFSP based on the needs of the individual child for a particular service, a service may be provided in such a setting.”

## **Letter to the Honorable Dianne Feinstein, California, March 21, 2000:**

Digest of the letter: In response to a letter from constituents, the Honorable Dianne Feinstein requested clarification from the U.S. Department of Education on regulations related to natural environments.

Selected text from the Response: . . . "We share . . . concerns for the networking and training needs of parents. These are particularly important family needs and should be addressed by the IFSP team as part of the development of the child's IFSP. The identification of parent support, training or counseling, as a needed early intervention service, can be provided either through Part C, or by referral to an organization that offers these services (e.g., a Parent-to-Parent Training and Information Center, a Parent-to-Parent program, or other family support or advocacy organizations.) Where these meetings or training will take place should be part of the overall discussion in the development of the IFSP. A variety of locations for training activities could be considered, such as a public library, another family's home, etc. Services for parents alone, such as parent support, are not required to take place in 'natural environments'."

### **Direction Provided by OSEP Staff at the 1998 DEC Conference.**

"Services in natural environments support the natural flow of a family's activities; are delivered where the child lives, learns and plays; decreases family's marginalization; uses natural supports; and builds on existing capacity of the community."

<sup>1</sup> After review and feedback from the IDEA Coordinator's Association membership, the Board of Directors approved the position paper on April 3, 2000.